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# Rethinking the Politics of Writing Differently Through *Écriture Féminine*

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the writing practices most often associated with French feminist thought called *écriture féminine* and subjects it to debates concerning embodied writing in management and organisation studies. *Écriture féminine* explores the intersections between language, sexual difference and writing from the body. Often considered a distinct and alluring strand of feminist writing and philosophy, I draw together possibilities for its use and explore implications that emerge for teaching and researching management and organisations. With focus on two modes of writing the feminine, through Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, the intersections between sex/text are examined and form ways of decentring conventional modes of writing. The paper concludes with discussing the politics of writing differently for researching, teaching and writing about organisations, the need to expose the effects of a masculine singularity in writing and how it may suppress and conceal possibilities but also offer opportunities for claiming space for an affective feminist politics inscribed in language.

**Keywords**

body, Cixous, *écriture féminine*, embodiment, feminist politics, Irigaray, language, sexual difference, writing.

## **Introduction**

‘It is in the repressed, feminine or unconscious ‘other’ of language – what language does not say – that the feminist revolution must find a base’ (Sellers, 1991:xv).

The beautiful tension between language and the body is highlighted by Höpfl (2000:101) who puts the dilemma succinctly: ‘It is difficult to *convey* the problem of feminine writing without seeking to transgress the text and, yet, every transgression will invite correction...However, since every explanation is a further *incorporation* into the body of the text this project is self-defeating. On the other hand, without explanation, the attempt becomes untenable. A lack of discipline in writing is considered inept, unprofessional’. We write our ‘selves’ into the margin, an ever-present body who looks in through the window. This paper begins and ends with the tensions and struggles of writing the body, the politics of feminist voices, what forms they may take, why they might take them and the potential for a feminist politics realised through feminine writing practices. As writers, we are confronted by writing that privileges a masculine singularity, or ‘phallic writing’ (Höpfl, 2000), such that difference is concealed, and where ‘the ontological function of language ‘pushes and pulls at the very identity of the researcher and of those researched’ (Rhodes, 2009:655; Pullen, 2006).

Dallery (1992) notes, as a form of women’s writing or writing the body the core objective of *écriture féminine* was to represent repressed, misrepresented femininity in the discourses of western culture. Traditionally, the preconditions of the production of western knowledge has required the exclusion and silencing of the feminine, the bodily and the unconscious

(Dallery, 1992). However, if women ‘begin to speak and write *as men do*, they will enter history subdued and alienated; it is a history that, logically speaking, their speech should disrupt’ (Gauthier, 1974:162-3). *Écriture féminine* has hitherto received limited attention in the study of organisations, although notable exceptions exist (see Fotaki et al, 2014; Harding et al, 2012; Dale, 2001; Höpfl, 2000; Oseen, 1997, 2005; Metcalfe, 2003; Phillips et al, 2014; and Vachhani, 2015, for a handful of notable examples). Where it has been considered there has been little focus devoted to closely examining the anatomy of writing strategies employed by these writers.

As a philosopher, linguist and psychoanalyst, Irigaray’s intervention into philosophical texts is concerned with retracing the masculine imaginary to demonstrate how women have been reduced to silence, muteness or mimicry. At the same time she attempts to rediscover a possible space for the feminine (Irigaray, 1985a; 1985b; Fotaki et al, 2014). For Irigaray,

‘The issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which women would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal. Which presupposes that women...do not claim to be rivalling men in constructing a logic of the feminine that would still take onto-theo-logic as its model, but that they are rather attempting to wrest this question away from the economy of the logos’ (Irigaray, 1985b:78 cited in Whitford, 1989:126).

Cixous, as a novelist, playwright and philosopher advocates the freeing of the self through writing and interrogates the binary structure of masculine thought (Sellers, 1991) where a law organises what is thinkable by oppositions (Cixous, 1976; Sellers, 1994; Phillips et al,

2014). This paper contributes to the theoretical and philosophical challenges around writing differently and, as the special issue call attests, considers how writing the body has the potential to be a site of power and change.

I explore how *écriture féminine* provides a compelling mode of feminine writing that develops a distinct, affective feminist politics for teaching and researching management, where bodies are both active and inscribed upon (Fotaki et al, 2014; Vachhani, 2015). The intertwining of body and text still raises political tensions. Only by recognising these tensions can the potential for writing differently be realised in a way that challenges the structures of academic practice that conceal the feminine and gendered multiplicity. What is necessary is the development of a more complex gender/body/knowledge (Jaggar and Bordo, 1992) understood by examining the anatomy of these writing practices in order to re-articulate difference in writing that claims a space for the feminine in our classrooms, conferences, books and journals.

Affective feminist politics arise from the processes of silencing and disappearance of the feminine that questions the production of legitimate knowledge, through intervening in texts and practices that effect change (Coleman and Rippin, 2000). The paper is structured as follows: the relationships between language, sexual difference and embodied writing are explored which situates the feminist politics at the heart of *écriture féminine*. The paper then turns to the feminine writing strategies employed by Cixous and Irigaray which raise key questions about the politics of writing differently. I mobilise this writing by directly addressing Cixous and Irigaray in my own embodied voice at the start of each section.

Addressing them directly is an invitation to the other that enacts a form of feminine proximity and cultivates a space for embodied engagement. Finally, the implications of the complex intersections between gender/body/knowledge for teaching, learning and writing about management and organisations are discussed.

### **Language, sexual difference and embodied writing - Situating *écriture féminine***

Women have traditionally been made to assume the role of materiality (as opposed to reason) but simultaneously divorced from their bodies as they are typically socially and culturally produced. Given the censored, repressed nature of the feminine and feminine subjectivity, French feminists called for promoting the radical alterity of woman's sexual difference in the form of *écriture féminine* or *parler-femme* (Dallery, 1992). A distinct and alluring strand of French feminist philosophy (Fraser, 1992), the subversive potential of *écriture féminine* carries with it, 'Connotations of writing...that makes silence and absence speak; or of the feminine as a sexual undecidability that goes beyond and subverts the opposition between male and female' (Rabine, 1987:19). Irigaray and Cixous are particularly significant in this regard as they both propound a feminine poetics (Conley, 1984; Whitford, 1991) which take sexual and linguistic difference as a central principle to the feminist project.

The potential of *écriture féminine* lies in it being 'the most propitious means for dismantling patriarchal language, and, through language, the social and cultural oppression of women' (Lindsay, 1986:47; Fotaki, 2013). The premise of *écriture féminine* is to

inscribe women's difference in language, where writing itself is a political issue and political practice (Gatens, 1999). Proponents of *écriture féminine* have argued that this writing seeks to promote difference rooted in discourse, including biological discourses. Rather than rooting difference as biological 'facts' the question is how 'culture marks bodies and creates specific conditions in which they live and recreate themselves' (Gatens, 1999:231). Critics have questioned the essentialist nature of such writing (Fuss, 1992), however, discussions around strategic essentialism have put the binary essentialism/antiessentialism into question (Whitford, 1994). Thus, essentialism may be 'interpreted as a *position* rather than as an ontology, and Irigaray to be interpreted as a strategist...rather than as an obscurantist prophet of essential biological or psychic difference' (Whitford, 1994:16). Thus, essentialism could operate politically, to subvert representations of the female body (Stone, 2006) and be politically transformative.

The politics of *écriture féminine* rest on how to *modify* the context of male/masculine privilege in language, signifying practices and discourses and, as Irigaray argues, to consider sexual difference as contiguous, rather than hierarchical, between sexually specific subjects (Metcalf, 2003; Oseen, 2005; Vachhani, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. This serves to foster the multiplicity and experience of the feminine speaking subject. As Duras writes in the essay '*Smothered Creativity*', 'I think "feminine literature" is an organic translated writing...translated from blackness, from darkness. Women have been in darkness for centuries[...] And when women write, they translate this darkness' (Duras, 1975, cited in Marks and de Courtivron, 1981:174). The body and text are brought together in order to critique the feminine as a 'shadow' of masculine matter-substance (Fotaki et al, 2014;



Irigaray, 1985a). The key issue is how writers' relationships to masculine theoretical discourses both reject *and* imitate male models (Rabine, 1987), and provide the conditions of membership (Höpfl, 2003). A break from this reproduction involves examining whose language is being spoken and how women might find a voice by challenging the system of language itself. As Fotaki et al (2014:1246) write, 'if the acquisition of language marks the entry into the symbolic order in which women are subjected to patriarchal law, women must disrupt the norms that subjugate them and re-create their own means of representation (Fotaki, 2013) in order to break away from that subjugation'.

The complementary styles and modes of writing employed by Irigaray and Cixous demonstrate related but contrasting concerns. They utilise deconstruction and psychoanalysis whilst performing *écriture féminine* in distinct ways. What focuses their writings are the connections between sexual difference and textuality that seek to expose a neglected and systematic repression of women's experience (Sellers, 1991, 1994). Both Cixous and Irigaray share, 'A deep critique of the modes through which the West has claimed to discern evidence – or reality – and a suspicion concerning efforts to change the position of women that fail to address the forces in the body, in the unconscious, in the basic structures of culture that are invisible to the naked eye' (Jones, 1981:247).

For Irigaray, 'women will only begin to speak *as women* by refusing the current order altogether, since to adopt this order, which exists to express men's perceptions, modes of organisation, needs and desires is necessarily to speak *as a man*' (Sellers, 1991:96; Fotaki et al, 2014). Cixous and Irigaray cultivate distinctive yet connected approaches that

illustrate ways of ‘intervening’ in patriarchal discourse, proposing a feminine relation to the other and an insistence on (feminine) proximity. By developing a feminine symbolic they cast light on what is yet unthinkable in the structures of (western) society. In order to examine the anatomy of this writing and its political potential, the next two sections focus on closely examining how Cixous and Irigaray invoke their feminine poetics, namely Cixous’s strategic play of binaries and the philosophical ploy and mimetic strategy in Irigaray’s work. Each section starts with my embodied voice that directly engages and speaks to Cixous and Irigaray as a way of fostering a feminine proximity, working with the interiority of their ideas and intended to adopt a different voice that expresses feminine difference in writing.

### **Cixous and writing the feminine**

*What does it meant to write from the wilderness, you ask.*

*A voice crying in the wilderness,*

*For you the voice of a body dancing, laughing, shrieking, crying.*

*The voices of women, newborn and yet archaic,*

*voices of milk and blood,*

*silenced but savage (Cixous and Clément, 1986:ix).*

*Whose voice is this?*

*Is it your echo?*

*I have not yet come in from the wilderness.*

*I keep my body from you.*

*Have I given you a sense of who I am?  
A woman of colour writing about white, French feminists  
whose texts have performed their seductive gesture on my skin?  
The craft of writing the body seems at once completely natural and yet alien.  
Our feelings unwritten, savage,  
tied to comfort or convention,  
tamed or hiding in the shadows.  
I lay decapitated in front of you.  
Are you a way out, a foray into the unknown?*

Cixous focuses on ‘women’s relegation to the role of other as a result of the binary structure of masculine thought’ (Sellers, 1991:15) where a law organises what is thinkable by oppositions (Cixous, 1976). In the text above I engage Cixous as an interlocuter. I write to Cixous directly, as an invitation to the other and to cultivate a feminine proximity; to speak with and to her. For Cixous, writing manifests a form of resistance where the intersection between sex/text form texts<sup>2</sup> (Farmer, 2001; Kuhn, 1981). There is a movement between proximity and distance exemplified in Cixous’s style (Cixous, 1976, 1981). As Moi (2002:101) posits, ‘Her style is often intensely metaphorical, poetic and explicitly anti-theoretical, and her central images create a dense web of signifiers that offers no obvious edge to seize hold of for the analytically minded critic’. This approach defines the impossibility of prescribing a method to writing the body. The invention of a new language, as Cixous (1976) intimates in ‘*The Laugh of the Medusa*’, transforms the structures of western language ‘by incorporating the bodily signifiers of feminine erotic

drives into the very texture of writing' (Rabine, 1987:21; Harding et al, 2012). For Cixous, 'In so far as woman is socially "initiated", she is initiated by decapitation, either metaphorically (mutism) or literally...She has nothing to forfeit but her "voice", her head, her reason' (Gatens, 1988:65). Central to Cixous's style is assessing and interrogating the dualisms that structure thought (and emblematic of continental philosophical thought in France at that time).

An example of this interrogation is in 'Sorties' where she writes how western thought is conceptualised in binary oppositions which necessitates a re-articulation of the feminine and recognition that asserting the opposite is necessarily parasitic on difference rather than an escape from it (Cixous and Clément, 1986; Oseen, 2005). The possibility of 'participation' for women is conditioned by how western thought has been organised (Höpfl, 2000; 2003). Thus, Cixous offers a practice of feminine writing 'by posing plurality against unity; multitudes of meaning against single, fixed meanings; diffuseness against instrumentality; openness against closure' (Kuhn, 1981:38; Cixous, 1981; Phillips et al, 2014). An example of this is demonstrated in her writing of Joyce's *Ulysses* where she uses plural tones and voices as a form-breaking device (which has drawn comparisons to Bakhtin's 'bawdy carnival of language', Lindsay, 1986:49),

'She wanders, but lying down. In dream. Ruminates. Talks to herself. Woman's voyage: as a *body*. As if she were destined – in the distribution established by men (separated from the world where cultural exchanges are made and kept in the wings of the social stage when it is a case of History) – to be the nonsocial, nonpolitical, nonhuman half of the living structure. On nature's side of this structure, of course,

tirelessly listening to what goes on inside – inside her belly, inside her “house.” In direct contact with her appetites, her affects’ (Cixous, 1986:66).

The lack of formalisable approach resounds a poetic freedom which at times is novel and provocative whilst being puzzling and seemingly inconsistent (Conley, 1984).

‘For this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination’ (Cixous, 1976, cited in Moi, 2002:107).

In ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ Cixous disinters, disturbs and reclaims the myth by endowing Medusa with a voice and exposing the ways in which power is denied to women through restrictions and controls. Cixous’s words are enthralling and powerful: ‘They riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss. That would be enough to set half the world laughing, except that it’s still going on’ (Cixous, 1976:885). She plays with the ambivalence of the myth of Medusa and myths about women. Reading Cixous I sense the plural tones and voices of Medusa, the intense hyperbole of Cixous’s manifesto reverberating through my own body which cannot be denied. The savage voices, the ferocious sopranos, as Sandra Gilbert writes, that mark the explosive return of woman. Cixous’s invocation is one of openness that women should write their bodies to ‘nurture’ a new type of text in which the feminine body is celebrated and is a product of the body’s

libidinal and generative drives which she does by recuperating Freud's term 'dark continent' (Lindsay, 1986:49).

### **The philosophical ploy of Irigaray**

*I write to you.*

*You ask: Who are you?*

*Do our lips speak together? As one?*

*Do we touch?*

*You speak with many voices, the voices of philosophers.*

*What must it be like to converse with Plato?*

*To inhabit the thoughts of others,*

*The thoughts of these 'masters';*

*To ride with their linearities and split their logic like vegetal tendrils.*

*Those masters who rule our worlds without words.*

*I craft my body for you*

*yet I feel too painfully how the feminine*

*becomes subsumed, consumed and unwritten.*

*How do we break this bind?*

*Do we perform our own mimesis?*

*Mimicry from the shadows.*

*Tensions surface in our bodies, together.*

*The pendulum swings of pain and joy inevitably come to rest in our bones.*

*Savage and unyielding.*

*This joy is secreted in blood, in milk; written in sweat from our lips.*

*Of placental thinking as a translation of darkness;*

*It is part of our birth.*

Irigaray's mimetic strategy, whilst being polysemic and multivocal, 'intervenes' in classic philosophical texts in order to presence the feminine. It attends to the suppression and disappearance of the feminine, for which she creates a dialogue in a number of philosophical texts, from Plato to Heidegger (Atkin et al, 2007; Metcalfe, 2003; Oseen, 1997; Vachhani, 2012). In the words above I attempt to recreate this multivocality and engage with Irigaray as an interlocutor; asking a series of unfolding questions that foster the inseparability of our thinking together.

Whitford (1991) notes the diversity of interpretations Irigaray's work has attracted which signals its fertility and complexity in fostering the creative relationship between reader and text. What is interesting 'is what Irigaray makes it possible for us to think' (Whitford, 1991:3-4; Fotaki, 2011; Fotaki et al, 2014). Irigaray (1985a; 1985b) stresses the morphology of the body especially the active, desiring body which is productive and dynamic and defies the traditional divisions between knowing and being (Harding et al, 2012); challenging dominant dualisms such as mind/body and nature/culture in the economy termed self-same only able to refer to a singular masculine subject.

Irigaray writes, ‘Speaking (as) woman...implies a different mode of articulation between masculine and feminine desire and language’ (Irigaray, 1985b:136). The erasure of the feminine she identifies constitutes and symbolises an injury in which sexual difference is unable to be recognised. This is an active engagement with developing a feminine morphology through ‘two lips’ not as female biology but as a metaphor to challenge traditional constructions of the feminine. By challenging these constructions, Irigaray introduces the potential for *dialogue* between men and women (Gatens, 1999). Gatens (1999:232) continues, ‘To attempt to “write” the repressed side of these dualisms is not, necessarily, to be working for the reversal of the traditional values associated with each but rather to unbalance or disarrange the discourses in which these dualisms operate. It is to create new conditions for the articulation of difference’.

The echoed sexuality of rhythmic movement, the penetration and mixing of dialogue demonstrates the difference Irigaray embroiders in her writing (Fielding, 2003; Vachhani, 2012; 2015). She adopts a style of amorous relations in pursuit of wedding language and the body (Irigaray, 2000a:17, also cited in Fielding, 2003:2). For example, in *To Be Two* Irigaray (2000a) outlines how to read *The Forgetting of Air* (Irigaray, 1999) in which she cares about the gaps and spaces in Heidegger’s thinking, especially where she feels Heidegger has not pushed his thinking far enough (due to a neglect of sexual difference). She takes Heideggerian terms and uses them in a way that mimics, yet continues and highlights the lacunae in his argument, as if inhabiting Heidegger’s line of thought. Irigaray opens up a discussion with Heidegger, moving through his arguments, questioning, sealing, unpicking and re-stitching his thought respectfully and intriguingly. To illustrate, Irigaray



(1999:87) writes: ‘Isn’t to resubmit to language in fact to resubmit oneself – and to resubmit *physis* – to *technē*?...In a ceaseless inversion of that *archē* where the whole is lost in the density of a still-virgin “corporeal” site. Where the chance for a remainder still left to come is pre-apprehended, without yet being able to be expressed. With this move, Heidegger indeed revisits the whole of metaphysics, heading for that which, at the start was lost -and kept- within it. But he remains within its architectonics: the *logos*’.

Irigaray works with Heidegger to use *physis* as not simply the ontological difference between ‘being’ and ‘beings’, but as ‘first matter’ and ‘forms’, as the elements such as air (Fielding, 2003). The *matter of physis* from which beings originate is forgotten and therefore the air, which is for Heidegger meaningless, is for Irigaray that which nurtures life (ibid:7). Irigaray does this in order to mimic but also to invent dialogue almost as if they were ‘lovers’ quarrels’, to move through philosophers’ words, to fold over them but not to write over them, to give and take in one movement (Fielding, 2003).

Irigaray’s re-writing of the philosophers (Chanter, 1995) demonstrates how the death and transfiguration of Socrates inscribed at the beginning of philosophy conceals the death of the mother. Irigaray empowers the silenced energy of these texts (Hodge, 1994) in re-writing the ‘myth of the cave’ in the section on Plato’s *Hystera* in *Speculum*:

‘ “While carrying their burdens, some of them, as you would expect, are talking, others silent”. As you would expect. Really and truly? Yes, you would expect it, given the systems of duplication, the rules of duplicity, that organize the cave. For if everyone talked, and talked at once, the background noise would make it difficult or

even impossible for the doubling process known as an echo to occur. The reflection of sound would be *spoiled* if different speakers uttered different things at the same time. Sounds would thereby become ill defined, fuzzy, inchoate, indistinct, devoid of figures that can be reflected and reproduced. If everyone spoke, and spoke at once, the silence of the others would no longer form the *background* necessary to highlight or outline the words of some, or of one. Silence or blanks function here in two ways to allow replication. *Of likeness*' (Irigaray, 1985a:256-257).

In this excerpt, the tactics Irigaray employs involves re-writing Plato's myth by taking his words and introducing another way of reading them, in this instance by re-reading sound. Pushing Plato's ideas to their limit accomplishes a mimetic strategy that highlights gaps and fallacies in the text, however, rather than adopting a position of exteriority Irigaray enters the text to work with its own logic. Irigaray uses the interiority of Plato's thought and writes with the body in order to 're-organise' the myth of the cave. These entanglements have been described as intimate tussles with philosophers (Chanter, 1995; Fielding, 2003) which provide challenges for feminine writing by recognising sensations and bodily performances. Next I examine implications for teaching and researching in management and organisation studies (MOS) that arise from the politics of writing that re-articulate difference, and promote a richer understanding of the intersections between gender/body/knowledge (Jaggar and Bordo, 1992).

## **Rethinking the politics of writing differently – Politics, possibilities and struggle**

*Words stick to my skin*

*The rhythm, the play of darkness where I cannot see you.*

*Writing the politics of exposure, of self-disclosure.*

*Or could it be*

*The sea of vulnerability from which we write (Pullen, 2017)*

*Putting ourselves on the line.*

*Have we come out*

*Of the wilderness together*

*As two?*

*The order and regiment is clear*

*Stitched up, strategic seams to be unpicked.*

*But for who?*

*What is between us? How are we connected?*

*Dare I even ask who you are?*

*We are strangers yet we are close.*

*Too close. Walking the line together.*

*Absorbing and reproducing what you feel, how you think.*

*Writing from our lips.*

*These are amorous relations*

*This is how we bear the weight of the feminine.*

These words return me to my body. They surface the politics, struggles and possibilities of feminine writing and through Irigaray and Cixous invite a style of amorous relations with the reader. How might we rethink the politics of writing differently in the field of management and organization studies? How can we cultivate, mobilise and open up spaces for *écriture féminine*? A tension arises: 'How can attempts to develop new structures of subjectivity and language integrate themselves into social struggles, which by necessity take place within the dominant discourse?' (Rabine, 1987:21; Hopfl, 2000; Pullen, 2017) in which feminine subjectivity is often distilled, supplemental or discarded (Metcalf and Linstead, 2003). The remainder of the paper explores this rethinking and how body politics inscribed in language might enable and disable struggles to produce, or to birth, feminine writing.

As discussed earlier, language is a site of political struggle and 'within the academy, we write to install ourselves into authority' (Grey and Sinclair, 2006:452). Writing the body is a deliberately political act (Dale, 2001) where a style that is open-ended, incomplete and uncertain, demonstrated here through Irigaray and Cixous, may effect concrete changes in challenging gendered structures in researching, writing and teaching about organisations. This creates the basis for what could be termed an affective politics of *écriture féminine* but simultaneously highlights the very difficulty of writing the body. Critics have debated the political potential of *écriture féminine* as overly abstract or exclusionary, that is to say negative to a feminist project, by separating women by class and biology. Simone de Beauvoir considered it to be divisive and inappropriate for feminist politics due to its

arcane language and a feminist politics would be more effectively accomplished by utilising everyone's language (Kuykendall, 1984, cited in Whitford, 1989).

However, *écriture féminine* also offers the possibility to draw out the ambivalence and multiplicity of 'conflicting desires, doubts and discourses in shifting spaces and times that can indeed threaten the very concept of gender itself' (Pullen and Knights, 2007:506). Femininity becomes 'a placeholder that signals embodied difference, rather than a gendered or sexed category' (Varino, 2018:294). For Cixous this constitutes liminal politics that demonstrate the plasticity, flexibility and malleability of femininity (Varino, 2018; Phillips et al, 2014) and involves developing a feminine imaginary. Such an imaginary draws together the personal and political and gives rise to writing as 'difficult joy' (Cixous and Clement, 1986; Beavan 2018). As Harding et al (2012:55) note, 'It is the absence of adequate linguistic, social, iconic, theoretical, mythical, religious and abstract scientific symbols for woman "by which to represent herself"...that has the most detrimental consequence.' Rethinking the politics of writing differently means returning our language to the feminine and a radical engagement with women's bodies (Pullen, 2017) that mobilise the embodied tussles and entanglements between body and text.

Performing feminine difference, through Irigaray and Cixous, using allusive metaphor, poetry, figurative language, mimesis and breaking structural conventions enable us to rethink the politics of writing differently. For Irigaray, women touch themselves all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Within herself, she is already two (Sellers, 1991:76). Pullen (2017)

writes the ambivalence of feminine difference by literally writing from the lips. These are acts of resistance ‘in the communities of women who work, often invisibly, to create safe spaces to work, live and write... and caring for others in the university’ (Pullen, 2017: 127-8). As academic pressures contribute to the fracturing of our academic selves, writing differently fosters an ethics of vulnerability. The effects of suppressing and silencing the tensions and difficulties of our bodies have far reaching effects for women and men. It also means channeling the hysteria designated to the feminine precisely as a meaningful ‘disruption of traditional epistemological methods of seeing/knowing’ (Diamond, 1997: 5, cited in Varino, 2018: 298).

These affective politics show how the personal becomes political and include ambiguities, contradictions, paradoxes, or being exiled or personally attacked for these endeavours. Irigaray, for example, has occupied an exiled position since her ejection from the Lacanian School (Irigaray, 1991; Whitford, 1991). These silencing gestures have the productive potential to challenge institutional authority, rather than installing ourselves in the margin. ‘For there to be an *écriture* feminine, in the widest possible understanding of the term, the writer must be able to bring the outside world, the truly “other” into her writing’ (Blyth and Sellers, 2004: 50, cited in Varino, 2018: 297). An engagement with bodily writing means consistently questioning how we think and organise beyond terms that are currently available to us (Oseen, 2005; Martin, 1990) and is ‘a challenge for politics and for all of us claiming to want to write from our bodies’ (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008:258). Or, as Fotaki et al (2014) call for, a feminist *écriture* of/for organization studies that does not suppress and conceal possibilities for understanding difference as a recognition of the feminine.

‘For Cixous, feminine writing is invested in eliciting plural readings and on reflecting upon itself, since the poetic writer “knows that she will never fully understand or solve the problem which she has set her mind upon” (Blyth and Sellers, 2004: 67)’ (Varino, 2018: 298). This might well mean instilling poetic writing, plurality of voices and dialogic readings in our classrooms, imbuing them with experiments in writing with their messiness, textures and contamination of the text (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008) that redefine the relationship between writer and reader as fluid and dynamic and challenge the persistent urge to write logically and rationally.

The shame and anxieties that arise from our bodies are rendered problematic or troublesome and a densely metaphorical, atheoretical style has no edge to seize hold of for the analytically minded critic (Moi, 2002:101). The feminine is thus rendered abject or marginal (Pullen, 2006), a familiar theme. If the feminine is to be ‘presenced’, it means confronting the politics of revealing oneself in a context that is currently unable to bear its weight. These struggles mean re-writing, reshaping and re-enacting femininity (Varino, 2018), practicing its difference and writing from the wilderness (Cixous, 1986). It means risking failure. ‘Reiterating femininity as an antagonizing form of difference can open discursive, social and material spaces for a liminal politics to unfold (Varino, 2018:307). These might be awkward experiments, ‘exposing the limits of language and meaning at the core of any medium, even as they estrange and astound’ (Varino, 2019, 307). These practices require an openness to think together that cannot be defined by specific methods and surface bodily politics and plural voices:

‘The only reply that can be given to the question of the meaning of the text is: read, perceive, feel...who are you? Would be a more pertinent question, provided that it does not collapse into a demand for an identity card or an autobiographical anecdote. The answer would be: and who are you? Can we meet? Talk? Love? Create something together? Thanks to which milieu? What between-us [entre-nous]?’ (Irigaray, 1991:14).

The contribution of this article has been to expose the political potential of *écriture féminine* for understanding the intersections between gender, body and knowledge. The practical significance of *écriture féminine* sees the body as a site of experience to effect change and to empower the silenced energy of the feminine. This moves us beyond polarised performances of femininity in organisations (Tretheway, 1999), self-same logic and inner symbolic coherence (Gherardi, 1994) that writers such as Cixous and Irigaray attempt to dismantle and opens up practical and methodological possibilities for future research and writing. As Irigaray explains, these politics necessitate defining new values, meanings and codes for feminine subjectivity that foster co-existence and gendered/sexed difference: ‘The horizon has to change before a culture that cares about existence, presence, intervention in the world and the relationship between two subjects comes about.’ (Irigaray and Lotringer, 2000:10-11). These feminist politics are always at risk and it is from this risk that we will be able to write differently.



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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> As Butler (1990:27) affirms, for Irigaray, ‘Sexual difference is not a simple binary that retains the metaphysics of substance as its foundation. The masculine “subject” is a fictive construction produced by the law that prohibits incest and forces an infinite displacement of the heterosexualizing desire. The feminine is never a mark of the subject; the feminine could not be an “attribute” of a gender. Rather, the feminine is the signification of lack, signified by the Symbolic a set of differentiating linguistic rules that effectively create sexual difference’.

<sup>2</sup> A translation of *sextes*, which as Kuhn (1981:38) notes, is an elision of *sexes* (‘sexual organs’) and *textes* (‘texts’).